Note the low impact of the bicycle tire, only visible due to the soft trail surface here. Also note the DWSP staffer’s boot (which also make tracks!) trampling vegetation off trail. Not a very good cover shot...

The rest of DCR and scientific studies performed worldwide conclude that mountain biking and hiking have approximately the same impact and should be managed the same.

DWSP has said “we don’t know trails nor do we want to”. The fact is they are just now coming to grips with the extensive trail network that has existed in the WRW for over 30 years, have no ability nor desire to manage it, and thus are using mountain bikers as a scapegoat to close it.
The DCR-DWSP has been spreading their anti-biking campaign using the misinformation contained in this or similar presentations to organizations including but not limited to the MWRA, MassDEP, MWRA Advisory Board, MA Water Supply Protection Trust, Environmental League of Massachusetts, Watershed Citizens Advisory Board, National Heritage, Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee, Quabbin Watershed Advisory Committee, local conservation commissions, Army Corps of Engineers, and the Appalachian Mountain Club.
The following slides will explore the DWSP’s choice to focus intently on eliminating benign\(^1\) passive recreation from the WRW while they ignore or commit offenses with far greater potential impacts to water quality.

\(^1\) according to the DCR, DWSP’s parent agency
11.09: General Rules and Regulations for the Protection of Watersheds and Watershed System

(1) Waters of the Watershed System.
   (b) No Person shall:
       1. engage in any construction activity involving filling, dredging, grubbing or altering land without adequate provisions to prevent erosion resulting in clay, silt or other turbidity laden waters from entering the Waters of the Watershed System;

       3. engage in any other activity which could degrade the quality of Waters of the Watershed System or interfere with their use as a source of water supply.

(2) Watershed System.
   (a) General Regulations.
       1. Entrance on and exit from land of the Watershed System shall be made through gates or other designated areas.

       5. All acts which injure the property of the Commonwealth are prohibited. No Person shall injure, deface, destroy, remove or carry off any property, real or personal, under the care and control of the Commission, including but not limited to, all historic artifacts and natural materials. The removal of gravel, topsoil, stones, boulders, or other earthen material is prohibited from the Watershed System except for removal for official use for land management purposes by Commission staff. No Person shall build or construct any object or structure on the property unless otherwise authorized by the Commission in writing.

   If it’s possible to continuously lace the forest with logging skid roads without worries of erosion, certainly it’s also possible to accommodate sustainable singletrack trails.

On the contrary, many erosion problems (either on trails or elsewhere) have existed for years in the WRW without any intervention by the DWSP to alleviate the problem.

There is no evidence ever gathered by DWSP to demonstrate that any of the trails, used by any user group, has ever caused, or is likely to cause, degradation of the water supply.
What is a sustainable singletrack trail?

Much thought and planning now goes into modern trail construction to consider the effects of water, traffic, and intended uses.

Sustainable singletrack is narrow (like the trail pictured here), sheds water, pays careful attention to slope rules, and provides a good user experience with minimal impact.

Why in a watershed?

First, why not? DCR recognizes mountain biking and hiking as having similar impacts. But, while hiking, as well as many other forms of recreation is allowed off road in the watershed, bicycles aren’t. Instead, **DWSP maintains the baffling view that mountain biking has more impact than OHVs or logging.**

Second, **WRW has one of the only significant trail networks in central MA.** But it’s the only one that satisfies beginner and intermediate level mountain bikers. See how smooth this trail is? Most other area’s trails are littered with rocks that make riding very challenging.

Finally, **DWSP manages 100K acres of public land in central MA so there isn’t much other public open space.**
Foot travel and geocaching are allowed, but orienteering is banned? Baseball is not passive recreation as it requires facilities and/or infrastructure. Mountain biking, like hiking, is passive recreation that only requires a trail. Many local riders ride to the forest from their homes, thus mountain biking requires the least amount of parking infrastructure!

9. Organized sports activities, including but not limited to orienteering and baseball, are prohibited in the Watershed System except by written permit from the commission or its designee.

14. The use of bicycles, skis and other means of non-motorized transportation within the Watershed System shall be permitted only in areas designated by the Commission or its designee.

Mountain biking is the only non-motorized recreation completely banned off-road in the WRW. Hiking, skiing, snowshoeing, running, and even horseback riding are allowed on trails.

23. All Persons within the Watershed System shall obey the lawful directions of regulatory signs, police officers or persons in charge, or of Federal or Commonwealth wardens or enforcement officers.

When DWSP was asked by hikers how to reconcile the rule that permits people on foot to walk virtually anywhere in the WRW with the recent closures of numerous trails to everyone, the DWSP answered “you can walk next to the closed trail, just not on it”. In other words, make the problem worse by widening the trail you’re trying to close!
This slide is attempting to show that the public access policy is formed from a factual analysis of impacts combined with input from the public. Truth: mountain biking was banned in a quiet 1994 rule change, in between the official 1988 and 2000 Public Access Plans for WRW.

As for a fair chance of DWSP ever changing this, here's an example of how that goes:

“Mountain biking is an issue that we have a hard time with every update to our Wachusett Reservoir watershed public access plan [...] Allowing mountain biking is the highest percentage of [public] comments we receive; [...] Do you know of any studies that have been done on the effects of mountain biking on water quality? Most information that I can find state that impacts are no worse than walking (not a great resource or help when you do not allow biking and are trying to explain to the public why [...]” --DWSP Environmental Analyst in an email to an outsider trying to find a fact to support the DWSP’s conclusion.
This regulation went unenforced for two decades (1994-2014). In a 2003 Worcester Telegram article, DWSP Regional Director Pula said he was not surprised that mountain bikers are riding on the trails and that they may not know of the restriction. However, he also said he has had no complaints about mountain bikers “It hasn’t come up as a problem so it’s not something we’ve dealt with.”

However, in 2014 DWSP suddenly and without consultation with any mountain biking groups started enforcing this regulation. When asked how the trails and the activity could be made legal, DWSP Director Yeo said “good luck with that”.

Of course, the DWSP would look bad for not taking action on the existence of trails or mountain biking until 2014, so they’ve chosen to frame the problem as an “explosion” of recent “destruction” and “out of control” activity with “hundreds” of new trails discovered. Such distortion: there aren’t even 100 total trails in the WRW and only about 10 of them are new in the last 10 years.
Horseback riding is allowed over an extensive trail system on DCR/DWSP property in the Ware River watershed because these areas are sufficiently hydrologically distant from the Quabbin and Wachusett Reservoirs (see www.mass.gov/dcr/watersupply/watershed/maps/wrachorse.pdf).

Mountain biking is limited because it is popular? “Bicycling can cause erosion on trails and be a safety hazard to watershed maintenance operations, active forest harvesting, and public vehicle operation on many DCR roads”

So hiking, hunting, fishing, geocaching, horseback riding...none of those can cause erosion or be a safety hazard to loggers or vehicles? And DWSP can’t allow bikes on trails because they could be a hazard to cars on watershed roads? So bicycles should stay on those roads instead?

DWSP is able to justify that which it wants to. This quote from the Wachusett Watershed Public Access Plan proves it.
There is so much to say here. First, this map is 16 years old from the 2000 WRW public access plan. But even the most recent bike map is nothing more than a copy of the automobile access map with the addition of two rail trail segments. Despite repeated DWSP claims that mountain bikers have access to “hundreds of miles of roads”, there continues to be no map showing where these roads open to us actually are.

Additionally, mountain bikers riding on maintained gravel roads in mid-summer have been threatened with tickets for doing so because no one at DWSP seems to be able to confirm whether a bicycle is or is not allowed to ride around a closed gate.
The primary alleged trail builder in both the Ware River and Wachusett Reservoir Watersheds was finally apprehended. This man, who self-identified as a cross country skier who desired more trails for his favorite activity, used a 20+ year old bicycle as transportation into the woods.

If the DWSP would simply focus on punishing the few folks building trails without permission instead of using the actions of a few to justify punishing everyone by closing trails and eliminating mountain biking, we could all actually coexist in the WRW.
Office of Watershed Management
Ware River Watershed Staffing

1 Forester 2
1 Environmental Analyst 3
1 Environmental Engineer 2
2 Maintenance Equipment Operator 2

By collaborating with the many willing and law-abiding citizens the DWSP would not need to expand their staff levels in the WRW like they are doing to eliminate mountain biking.

PILOT Payments to Ware River Watershed Communities

- $1.1 million annually (6 communities)
- Full payment made every year at top tax rate

Which DWSP can afford because it sells off the water and timber from the land in said communities! Let’s be clear: DWSP manages 100K acres of public land in central Mass, refuses to use best available information for assessing what recreation can take place, and has drawn an arbitrary and nonstandard distinction between activities of equal impact such that some residents must travel great distances to recreate while others may do so locally.
DWSP states this map depicts “illegal mountain biking trails”. A closer look shows that every single portion of the traveled route is on trails or roads that are or were authorized.

There are no “mountain biking” trails, all of the WRW trails have been unofficially “shared use” for decades.

Rides posted? No surprise here, DWSP knew about mountain bikers using the WRW for decades.
**Illegal single track Survey 2014**

This is a **very misleading** depiction of “illegal single track”. It marks two rail trails, at least four maintained gravel roads, several authorized equestrian trails, and even an un-locatable “trail” all as “illegal”.

- **Illegal trails are shown** in red and yellow
- **Yellow pins** represent a junction of three intercepting trails
- **Blue flags** represent trail heads that originate from MCRT
- **Our goal is to get a good understanding of the trail network within the watershed**

DWSP’s goal should first be to learn their own authorized routes and then how to use a GPS.

**Locals have searched and can’t find this trail**

**Longmeadow Rd**

**Kitchen Camp Fire Rd**

**MCRT**

**T3**

**Whitehall Rd**

**Pine Plains Rd**

**Ware River Rail Trail, and OHV created side trail**
More illegal trails within the watershed surveyed by our Foresters...

It’s safe to say at this point given all the debunked claims made in previous slides that if there’s a trail on the ground in the WRW, DWSP considers it illegal and built by mountain bikers.

Most of the red on this map is unknown to area mountain bikers.
"Priority Habitat" simply means that the location appears favorable for rare or endangered species based on aerial photographs. "Boots on the ground" would be required to identify any rare or endangered species in the areas indicated.

DCR Watershed has stewardship responsibilities for rare & endangered species habitat under MESA and Wetlands Protection Act.

Priority Habitat for Rare Species + Certified Vernal Pools across Ware River have been impacted by illegal trail construction and use.

The DWSP is wrapping up a logging operation in a Priority Habitat area here. Somehow, this can be managed to avoid impact.

Northern WRW: many vernal pools, few to no trails

Southern WRW: few vernal pools, most trails
• Illegal trails are shown in red and teal

• Yellow pins represent a junction of three intercepting trails

• Blue dots represent vernal pools

• Maroon outline are NHESP habitat

Only 2 vernal pools appear to lie near trails. Many other structures present in NHESP habitat including Route 122, MCRT, and Midstate Trail

If a trail is too close to a vernal pool it could be relocated.

Red and teal? The teal follows the Midstate Trail and Pine Plains Rd! (See dashed purple circled areas.) The only red is on a road atop a dike.
Forester inspecting latest trail damage cut through forest. This trail required significant cutting and machete work.

A path through the woods! Is it possible for forestry and recreation to coexist with no impact to water quality? Yes!

This was a skid road at one point, reduced to a singletrack trail now.
This is one of the wider parts of the trail that was here before its closure.

These photos redefine “significant cutting” and give some sense of the magnitude of logging skid roads. Why this is considered low impact and perfectly acceptable in a watershed forest yet a bicycle tire track is cause for hidden cameras and police presence?
Tree bark damage and sap running after biker’s blaze recently cut trail

“Biker’s blaze”? DWSP has no proof of who did these minor scuffs to the trees. This pales in comparison to the tree bark damage made by DWSP’s logging.
Just a small sampling of the incredible collateral bark damage following just one recent DWSP logging operation.
Built embankment off Rail Trail. Heavily used trail.

The routing of this trail and the “built embankment” actually prevents erosion. Trail routing across the fall line reduces erosion. This is an imperfect example of an attempt at sustainable trail construction.

DCR's response was to destroy built up embankment thereby accelerating erosion.

The last visit to this site showed fresh horse hoof tracks up the now-unstable decimated trailbed.
Through mature forest...

Looks like OHV damage

This simply can’t be seen as “destruction” of the forest. This is what happens when there is a significant portion of the state filled with open space yet completely underserved with regards to recreational trails. DWSP has failed to recognize or manage the vast trail network on its property. This situation often leads to people meeting their own recreational needs and the results of that are unpredictable.

DWSP has chosen to handle this in the most anti-public and expensive way possible, by closing down trails, installing surveillance cameras, hiring more staff, and blaming mountain bikers whenever anyone asks why they’re cutting trees down to save the forest from trail users.
MB tracks along heavily eroded trail next to water body. Tree root damage.

Heavy erosion is not apparent from the photo nor inspection of the trail. Nevertheless, a small alteration, such as routing the trail farther away from the water in this section, could solve this minor issue.

Similar root exposure can be found on any hiking trail, not just where bikes are used.
Steeply cut trail, heavy erosion

The grade is hard to read from this photo but this would be a case to evaluate: could it be made sustainable or should the trail be permanently closed? It certainly doesn’t look beyond repair here.
Clearly a woods road, all of which are supposedly open to bicycles. It even looks mowed.

Within Rutland State Park, this trail is used by many to access the loop around Whitehall Pond from the MCRT.

Unsure what the point of this picture is. There are lots of trails within the watershed that have sand at the surface.
A field visit to this site is in order, because with the abundance of bark and chunks of cut trees, this more closely resembles a logging landing than a wetland.

This is a narrow, rarely used path through the woods. To imply this is destruction of a regrowth area is extreme.
Ironically, this site is on a mapped **watershed road** subject to flooding. Does this mean that a DWSP road goes through a wetland? This is an example of people trying to keep the **authorized** foot and **bicycle** traffic **out** of the water. Bicycling is allowed on all DWSP roads, which would include this one.

This bridge appears on a rarely used trail as evidenced by a lack of online data about it and an obvious lack of use on the ground. Most local mountain bikers didn’t know it existed and those that did know didn’t ride it as the trail is blocked by fallen trees thanks to beavers, goes through a section of wetland, and should be closed. However, isn’t a bridge preferable to the alternative?
Trees that fall across the trail are cut and removed just as they are on every trail worldwide. It’s called trail maintenance and it’s not news...

These two are the same tree. Note how the stump is not in the trail. Think someone carried a chainsaw all the way out there to fell a standing tree that wasn’t in the way? It fell on its own and then was cut and removed to keep the trail open.

This is quite a stretch to imply this was either recent or the work of mountain bikers.
This was a good attempt to make a trail more sustainable by building a “bench cut”. There are some mistakes here recognizable to anyone familiar with modern trail building. But it pales in comparison to other erosion sites on DWSP’s own roads.

Wait until you see the root damage from DWSP logging projects. “Do as we say, not as we do”?

...root notched and chipped...
There appear to be a lot of damaged roots here. Literally everywhere one looks in any DWSP logging site roots are gouged, cut, or yanked out. But the forest always recovers.
On this slide the DWSP is highlighting erosion control measures built by concerned trail users. Log and rock enforced “cribbing” is used to help support the trail and prevent erosion.

Perfect example of a sustainable trail!
Classic OHV hill climb trails like these are quite prevalent in the WRW. By going straight up the fall line of the hill (the absolute opposite of sustainable design) combined with the sandy soil common in parts of the WRW, these trails have seen serious erosion and should be closed. To blame this on mountain bikers, which is exactly what DWSP has done by including these pictures here, is beyond ludicrous. Any local knows these have existed for decades and were “built” by OHVs.

Here’s a recent look at this same site: ATV tracks rutted up the hill climb and sped down the MCRT. This happens when the good guys are kicked out.
More of the same decades old legacy OHV trails. These trails were certainly never designed, much less with sustainability in mind. Many of the WRW trails, however, are sustainable or could be made so with volunteers willing to help. All such offers were refused by the DWSP because “why would we work with mountain bikers when we’re trying to eliminate mountain biking?”

Loss of herbaceous vegetation causes erosion and run off towards wetlands.

Deep erosion cuts and gullies...
Erosion sites are easy to find in the WRW

Severe erosion and deep trenches have existed on this powerline access road for years. At the bottom of this hill is Parkers Brook which flows into the Ware intake.

This DWSP road drainage trench is itself quite eroded...

And all road runoff and sediment flows directly into this wetland.

Multiple erosion sites evident on this DWSP road
DWSP’s plowing a bulldozer into a watershed tributary is about as bad as it gets for water quality risks and violations of at least the Watershed and Wetlands Protection Acts.
What we are doing now:

- Public education through letters, phone calls and meetings
- Posting of signs on Kiosk
- Better signage

“Bicycling Allowed On DCR Watershed Roads Only. Please Protect Our Watershed Resources”

DWSP’s implication, of course, is that bicycling off-road will destroy “our” watershed resources. And the irony is DWSP’s willingness to deforest the trailheads by felling large healthy trees to make their point.
Everywhere a sign... DWSP signs, cameras, state and environmental police and rangers everywhere, all because local taxpayers would like to ride bicycles on woods trails.
Levels of mud that would cause DWSP to ticket a bicycle rider don’t phase this large scale logging operation. Co-existence between public access and forestry is easy once hypocrisy subsides.

Case in point: this white sign installed months earlier closes to everyone the singletrack trail which used to wind through these woods. The sign reads “please protect these watershed resources”. The resources are stacked in that pile you see there.

Did you know: up to 10 gallons of gas or diesel can be spilled at a time without reporting the occurrence?

Grease cartridges and trash left behind
DWSP accuses people of destroying historic stone walls by moving rocks to allow a trail to pass through. These pictures of DWSP’s own stone wall devastation paint a very different picture.
DWSP still considers bicycles on trails their biggest threat even when this sampling of illegal dump sites have sat for years right next to an active watershed tributary and a watershed road and very close to two major public roads.

This recent dump was found by a mountain biker riding legally on a watershed road.

In RI, where the Big River watershed land allows mountain biking, every year NEMBA and other groups gather there for a massive cleanup day. This year about 180 volunteers filled 6 dumpsters with 23 tons of trash in 3 1/2 hours.
In the Wachusett Watershed, DWSP felled large trees all over the place to block trails people loved. DWSP Rangers tell people to “blame the mountain bikers” for this. Even trails that were marked and mapped open to bicycles are now shuttered by timber.
It’s About Water Quality... Or Is It?

The main claim by MWRA and DWSP against allowing mountain biking within the Ware River Watershed (and also by MWRA on any MWRA property) is that mountain biking causes devastating environmental damage and if they were to allow it, they would have to spend $500,000,000 on a water filtration facility to ensure that the water could be made safe for its customers.

Fourteen years of their own data does not support that claim. In fact, in the published turbidity summaries, only the following sources are noted as situations that have impacted turbidity negatively:
1. Storms
2. Shoreline activity
3. Problems at a DPW facility causing runoff
4. Beaver dam removals
5. Algae blooms

No note of recreation of any kind causing harm. Not even logging operations seem to be causing impact or noted in any test results. Considering that mountain biking, while not officially legal, has been an unenforced use of the Ware River Watershed for decades (in addition to all the other forms of recreation), and the published water quality test results show watersheds and water supplies with consistently, extremely low turbidity test results, it must be concluded that it was known that mountain biking has no negative impact on the resource in question and claims of environmental damage have no basis in fact as supported by the published data by MWRA and DWSP. There is, and would be, no need for a $500,000,000 water treatment facility if mountain biking, a legitimate form of sustainable passive recreation in the state of Massachusetts, is allowed within the Ware River Watershed – or any watershed or water supply in Massachusetts.